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AUTHOR Souza, Tasha J.
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ABSTRACT

Part of a more extended study, a study used discourse analysis to examine how instructors and students talk about sexist language in an attempt to discover their implicit language theories. Subjects, six instructors and six undergraduate students chosen from a convenience sample at a large western university, were interviewed and asked to comment on their own particular view of nonsexist language and the educator's role in the classroom. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed. Results indicated that many respondents provided comments that were consistent with the referential view of language. They stated that language is unimportant, a habit, and a reflection of society. However, some respondents looked at language as more of a system and provided responses consistent with both the objective systemic and subjective systemic view. The two implicit language theories that the student and instructor discourse seemed to center around were language as a system of signs that people create and use, and language as a system of signs, but as a constantly changing and evolving system that has the power to create, shape, or blemish. (Contains 30 references.) (RS)

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Implicit Language Theories: An Analysis of Student and Instructor Discourse about Nonsexist Language

Tasha J. Souza
University of Washington
Department of Speech Communication
Raitt Hall
Seattle, WA 98195
(206) 543-4860

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Introduction

Sexist practices have reflected our past cultural beliefs that certain rights and responsibilities belong to, or exclude, one sex or another. Sexist attitudes have been woven throughout the fabric of society demonstrated as Lather (1981) puts it by "male authority figures dominating religion, politics, and the world of work; marriage traditions where a wife subsumes her own identity in that of her husband; and the very language we conceptualize in, using 'he' as the generic, all inclusive pronoun" (p. 37). Some of the sexist attitudes have changed because social, political, educational, and professional opportunities have expanded and exposed the practices noted above. However, because our culture permeates our language system, sexist terminology still exists.

Although the use of sexist language is justified differently now, grammarians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries justified the establishment of their language practice of using "man"-linked words and masculine generics by claiming that God created males to be the "superior" and "most worthy" of the two sexes (Diamond, 1990). Sorrells (1983) states that "Existing communication patterns arose in a patriarchal culture that defines males as the norm and females as less than the norm" (p. 2). Even though most would agree that seeing "males as norm" is less prevalent today, the language we still use is not so innocent. Peterson (1992) claims that sexist language "functions as a disabling constraint on women to the extent that language--as an institution--trivializes, insults, and excludes women in ways it does not trivialize, insult, or exclude men" (p. 3).

Although sexist language has been linked conceptually to sexist behavior by various authors (e.g., Blaubergs, 1978; Bodine, 1975), controversy remains over whether sexist language can, in fact, affect social behavior (Briere & Lanktree, 1983). There are two very different positions concerning language change. Advocates of the first position argue that social change creates language change and not the opposite (Cole, Hill & Dayley, 1983). Lakoff (1973) agrees that the generic "he" does refer more to men than to women, but maintains that to change the language would be useless and may be fairly trivial. Similarly, Cameron (1985) claims that people have two different assumptions about sexist language: sexist language is a *symptom* of women's oppression or sexist language *causes* women's oppression. She argues that because language is a symptom and not a cause, language change does not

raise consciousness and works only as a "cosmetic measure" which fails to do justice in reducing women's oppression.

On the other hand, the second position views language as both a symptom and a cause of women's oppression. Miller and Swift (1976) quote a spokesperson for the National Organization of Women, Wilma Scott Heide:

> when changes are effected, the language sooner or later reflects the change. Our approach is different. Instead of passively noting the change, we are changing patterns to actively effect the changes, a significant part of which is the conceptual tool of thought, our language. (p. xi)

To understand how language is used is to understand what is central to the complicated business of living life as a human being. All people operate from an implicit theory of language that organizes their views about language and reality. Because of an implicit language theory, everyone has opinions in regard to sexist language and reasons for their beliefs about such language. Yet, researchers often fail to listen closely to people's language in use to understand people's choices in their use of sexist language and have never noted the connection between one's implicit language theory and their use of sexist language. As part of a more extended study, this paper focuses on the shaping forces of language and how theories of language are linked to one's perception of sexist language. In particular, this study is committed to taking a closer look at how instructors and students talk about sexist language in order to discover their implicit language theories. This paper first provides a brief overview of language theory. Secondly, it describes the method used and the assumptions revealed about language.

Language

Many of the previous arguments for and against language reform tie back to the relationship between language and reality. Language theorists have had to struggle with what language is, how people learn language, and language change. Is language a neutral medium for the transmission of information? Do people shape language or does language shape people? Do words people utter arise as a result of their thoughts, or are thoughts determined by the linguistic systems people have been taught? These questions have remained unanswered for centuries. Yet, in an attempt to answer these and other questions a number of language theories have been developed that reflect these tensions. Because of the

vast amount of literature about language available, a comprehensive review of language theory is beyond the scope of this paper. The literature falls generally into the six categories discussed below.

Six Language Approaches

There have been numerous classifications of and approaches to language generated and applied over the past two centuries. Some classification of approaches to language analysis is necessary in order to clarify the differences and tensions between the positions. One useful schema is offered by Grossberg (1979) who outlines six views of language and meaning arrayed on a two-dimensional matrix. His classifications of meaning and language have been adopted in order to organize the conceptual issues and frame the different approaches. One dimension is "subjectivity" versus "objectivity." The other dimension provides three general ways to understand language as referential, systemic, or processual. The six views of language are created by cross cutting these two dimensions: subjective and objective referential views, subjective and objective systemic views, subjective and objective processual views. In the section that follows each of these views along with the theories that complement them are defined and discussed.

Referential Views of Language and Meaning

A referential theorist views language as a collection of discrete signs, each of which has its own proper reference (concept, sense) and referent (object). This position views language according to its function and claims language exists as a factual and independent entity. Meaning is given through language insofar as people know the rules that enable them to see that to which the sign points. Because language is void of intrinsic meaning apart from the language user's consciousness, language must be viewed as a container which remains separable from the meaning/information it brings us.

The distinction between subjective and objective views in the general referential conception is the question of whether the reference or the referent is the primary source of meaning. Although both orientations see meaning as an entity referred to in some immediate and direct fashion by linguistic signs, they differ on the degree to which consciousness is considered the meaning's necessary locus (Grossberg, 1979). "Both positions tend to think of meaning as information—as a representation of some objective conditions—and to assume methodologically that this information is to be discovered

within language itself" (Grossberg, 1979, p. 194). In other words, it is the language itself which carries the meaning to us.

Both referential views consider language as an instrument people use, and the meaningfulness of language resides in its reference to some collection of entities (either subjective mental entities or objective external entities). The objective referential position denies the existence of any realm of mental entities. It is the reference to observable events, behaviors, and objects which constitutes the dominant notion of meaning. Meaning is a given property of the world discovered by people. For example, the use of the word "man" has referred to solely the male gender and to both genders when speaking of humankind. Within the objective referential view, the meaning of humans comes from the humans themselves and not the word chosen to identify them, whether it is "man" or "human." When a person sees a human, although the word "man" has referred to the human, it is the human that gives us the meaning. Therefore, language is simply a tool of transmitting information.

On the other hand, in the subjective referential view the sign refers to a mental entity located in the consciousness of the individual language users (Grossberg, 1979). This approach views people as the architects of meaning, and meaning as the property of consciousness. According to Hayakawa (1972) linguists within the general semantics movement have demonstrated that "meanings" do not reside in words, rather meanings reside in people. "We do not 'get' meaning from things, we assign meaning" (Postman & Weingartner, 1969, p. 99). Further, meaning exists prior to its expression in language and meanings themselves exist within a private consciousness. However, this notion of privacy cannot be taken to extreme, for then the possibility of shared meaning is hindered. This position parallels with semantics, or the study of meaning. Lyons (1981) defines the accepted theory of semantics as ideas or concepts "which can be transferred from the mind of the speaker to the hearer by embodying them, as it were, in the forms of one language or another" (p. 136). Referring back to the example stated previously about the word "man," the meaning of a human in this orientation exists as a mental image. Because "man" has been said to refer to humans, the word "man" can simply conjure up the mental image of humans. Once again, the language is neutral, but it is a person's individual consciousness that gives the word its meaning.

Systemic Views of Language and Meaning

Whereas referential theories assume the reality of our experience is both of ourselves as consciousness and of the world, systemic views examine the role language itself plays in constituting the meaning of and hence, our experience of both the self and the world (Grossberg, 1979). Postman and Weingartner (1969) argue that language is far from being neutral as the referential view would promote. The systemic view sees language as a productive, emergent, and creative system "rather than a merely passive mediator between people and the world" (Grossberg, 1979, p. 199). Meaning is seen as a property of the linguistic system and therefore, avoids separating consciousness and the world.

The proponents of the two subcategories of the systemic view divide over how to describe the linguistic system. These distinctions are similar to the distinction made by the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure argued for the distinction to be made between *langue* and *parole*. He regarded *langue* as a system or code that is prior to actual language use, which is the same for all members of a language community. "It is the abstract system of relations which make individual behavior possible" (Cameron, 1985, p. 13). *Langue* is the linguistic side of language as opposed to *parole*, which is individual performance (Fairclough, 1989). As particular instances of speech, the individual behavior of *parole* is regulated by *langue*. The systemic views claim that "language may be seen either as a system of quasi-objective elements standing in a particular relationship to one another or as a system of acts of speaking performed by individuals" (Grossberg, 1979, p. 199). On this ground, Grossberg makes the distinction between objective systemic and subjective systemic approaches.

Proponents of the objective systemic approach see language as an atemporal code manifested in its concrete actualizations in language use. In contrast to the referential approach that emphasizes the individual sign, the objective systemic approach emphasizes the relationship among them. Meaning is seen as the epiphenomenal consequence of interactions of the elements constituting language as *langue*. This conceptualization of meaning can be understood by examining the system of signs. Postman and Weingartner (1969) state that "the meaning we assign is a function of the pattern of system of symbols through which we order and relate whatever it is we are dealing with" (p. 99). Within this system, the signifier and signified are linked only by virtue of their location within the system. "The sign is constituted as a socially fixed relation of equivalence between a particular material signifier and its

signified" (Grossberg, 1979, p. 200). It is only within such a system that this relationship of signification is possible. Reality remains unintelligible prior to the intervention and mediation of the symbolic system. The structure of our understanding of ourselves and the world is determined by the structure of the language system itself.

The structuralist approach follows this objective systemic philosophy. Devitt and Sterelny (1989) state that within structuralism, there are no pre-existing ideas before the appearance of language. Our thought is shaped by our language. Therefore, objects remain unintelligible until we have a signifier to refer to them given to us by our language community.

Bowers (1987) claims that this approach is a restatement of Benjamin Whorf's insight that "the epistemological code inherent in language organizes the sense of meaning in terms of pre-established categories and rules of association acquired as the person becomes a member of the language community" (p. 5). For example, before a person formally address a female, she or he will search through the pre-established categories from his or her community of female forms of address. The categories of Mrs. and Miss organize the meaning of her identity by her marital status. Furthermore, if a female introduced herself with Ms., one would notice her refusal to categorize herself by marital status. Once again, this usage creates another marking or category for her identity. Yet, a person does not do the same when addressing a male in a formal situation with the word "Mr." His marital status goes unnoticed by the linguistic representation.

Within the objective systemic view it is difficult to account for historical change and individual creativity because the code is static. On the other hand, subjective systemic views begin with the primacy of speech. Meanings emerge from the system of language use, speech acts, or symbolic interactions. Grossberg (1979) claims that "the meaning of a sign or action is publicly available and identifiable as the role it plays in the context of the natural human world of interactions in situations" (p. 204). Language is seen as action, as doing something. Lyons (1981) asserted that this view of language was originated by Wittgenstein who emphasized the association between words and their use. This approach is also similar to the key insight of Searle's work cited in Fairclough (1989) on "speech acts" as it has come to be applied to communication. Fairclough (1989) stated that when a person is characterizing part of a text as a speech act, one is characterizing what the signifier "is doing by virtue of

producing it—making a statement, making a promise, threatening, warning, asking a question, giving an order" (p. 156).

Paulo Freire insists that language is at the center of our knowledge of ourselves and of others (Berlin, 1991). He believes that it is a social construction and a constantly changing set of formations whose meanings emerge as people engage in written and spoken dialogue with each other (Berlin, 1991). In acknowledging cultural effects on language, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is typically cited (Briere & Lanktree, 1983). The hypothesis argues that one's language can determine thought processes (Davis, 1993). As Sapir (1949) argued:

> The "real world" is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are different worlds, not the same world with different labels attached. (p. 162)

Because within the systemic approach language is seen as a system of conventions defining and dictating standardized usage, it has a constraining power over individuals. Therefore, language change can play a role in this approach. The use of the generic "man" can be seen as a speech act that functions to exclude women. The change from the generic "man" to a more inclusive word, such as "humankind," can act to include both genders.

Process Views of Language and Meaning

The systemic views just discussed have challenged the more traditional referential theories dominating social and literary theory (Grossberg, 1979). Although both versions of the systemic view have compelled theorists to acknowledge the reflexivity of the social world, the final two views in Grossberg's approaches bring the reflexive process a step further. The proponents of the processual views argue that the fundamental structure of human experience is an ongoing process of the constitution of meaning within which subject *and* object are constituted. These orientations acknowledge a unity, a non-differentiation of subject and object in the process of signification preceding their separation.

The subjective processual view reiterates the position of systemic subjective views but goes beyond it by describing the particular relation between language and transcendental consciousness (Grossberg, 1979). This approach attempts to problematize the world in its relation to the subject and to

describe the structures of consciousness which make meaningful experience possible. The most general characterization of the subjective processual view involves the redefinition of experience in terms of the process of intentionality, which is the constantly repeated conjunction of people and the world (Grossberg, 1979). Intentionality is the locus of experience and meaning, and is pre-explicit. In other words, it exists outside of our own everyday awareness. Meanings are not in the mind, they are dependent upon the processes of transcendental consciousness. Humans are both the creators and users of language. Therefore, the objectivity of the language is rooted in the subjective acts of the speaker. "Just as language use constitutes the speaking subject, it is also responsible for the possibility of our having and referring to a world" (Grossberg, 1979, p. 211). For example, if people hear the word "congressmen" all of their life, they will think of political leaders only as men. Therefore, when it is time to choose political leaders, people will turn to men. The language can perpetuate history.

The objective processual view is the most radical of views because it rejects the notion of a source or origin of meaning. Instead, it is assumed that all reality is a process constitutive of the meaningfulness and structure of experience. Grossberg (1979) states that "Our existence is a moment in a process in which the very structure of our participation (and hence, our identity as a participant) is produced or determined" (p. 216). This view does not look for "meaning" of a text (assuming that there exists some stable and unified set of signifieds hidden below the surface of the signifiers) because language and language use cannot be separated. Language defines the space in which we live; it is a web of connotations that represent the most available trace of the process of contextualization through which our existence moves and in which it is constituted (Grossberg, 1979). Therefore, people can create and re-create gender expectations through the language use and communication in the moment.

It should be evident through reviewing these language approaches, that there is no true or false theory of language. Some writers on the subject of language reform who hold to the referential view have claimed that language merely reflects societal practices (Lakoff, 1973). Others argue from the processual viewpoint that language patterns and cultural norms develop together and continually influence each other (Dayhoff, 1983).

A Framework for Research

The average person may not enter into the vocabulary of the scholarly frameworks that have been addressed, but when people argue over the issue of language reform, they are having essentially the same arguments as the language theorists. All people have a theory of language, whether they know it or not. Theories provide order to our everyday experiences of the world. "To theorize is to respond to meaningful questions with tentative answers" (Anderson & Ross, 1994, p. 29). Individuals have espoused theories, which are explicit and can be articulated, and theories-in-use, which can be implicit, but influence behavior nonetheless (Menges & Rando, 1989). Anderson and Ross (1994) asserted that how people perceive the world is theory-dependent. "We literally can't perceive meaningfully without bringing previously learned generalizations to bear on new circumstances" (Anderson & Ross, 1994, p. 30).

Because theories influence language behavior, it is important to examine the different theories in use. Most people are unaware of their assumptions about language. Even people who hold strong opinions about particular language practices, such as the use of the generic "he," are often unaware, however, of their assumptions. Although it is logical to assume that one's theory of language would affect language use, the influence of these implicit language theories on people's views about and use of sexist language has not been researched. Anyone whose goal is to inform and influence others to avoid using words, phrases or expressions must first look at the beliefs and perceptions people have about language.

The goal of this study is to bridge this gap by providing a rich interpretive account of language users' theories of language. Taking a communication perspective on people's language as they talk about sexist language may help in identifying their assumptions about language that underlie arguments and influence beliefs. The following research questions guided the investigation:

1. What assumptions do students and instructors make about the nature of language and its role in shaping and changing society?
2. How do the theories revealed from students' and instructors' discourse about sexist language compare to the more formal theories of language?

The Method

The method of discourse analysis was used to interpret the data. Discourse analysis is essential for examining the theories of people's informal language because it provides the researcher with a thorough understanding of language in use and an opportunity to discover how people construct meaning. There are several different ways in which to conduct the method of discourse analysis. In order to identify the meaning about language within the language, the focus was narrowed to an interpretive thematic approach, one which uses interviews as the technique to elicit textual information (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Peterson et al. (1993) state that "The face-to-face interview provides one of the most powerful methods for understanding how people order and assess the everyday world" (p. 7). Thematic analysis of the respondents' discourse obtained in these unstructured interviews enabled both explicit and implicit theories of language to emerge. Within this framework, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions related to nonsexist language were identified.

Six instructors and six undergraduate students (six males & six females), chosen from a convenience sample at a large western University, were interviewed and asked to comment on their own particular view of nonsexist language and the educator's role in the classroom. The group of students comprised of a female Mechanical Engineering major, a female Communication major, a female African American studies major, a male Electrical Engineering major, a male Aviation major, and a male Nursing major. The group of instructors was comprised of a female Business Management instructor, a female Women Studies instructor, a female Economics instructor, a male Recreation and Leisure Studies instructor, a male Biology instructor, and a male Economics instructor.

In order to understand how people reason about language, sufficiently open-ended questions were asked about the respondents' experience with sexist and nonsexist language in the classroom. This provided sufficient space for other potentially relevant concepts to emerge. As Argyris and Schön (1974) state "We cannot learn what someone's theories-in-use is simply by asking" (p. 7). Therefore, my goal was to ask questions that would generate a text that would make their implicit language theory clear. Interview length varied between 30 minutes and 120 minutes depending on the respondents' communication style, sexist language experience, interest, and competing time commitments.

A relatively unstructured protocol was used in order to capture their own somewhat naturally occurring discourse and to avoid unnecessarily limiting the content brought forth by the respondents. The interview consisted of responding to three scenarios and answering several questions about specific experiences, beliefs and opinions about nonsexist language and language reform in the classroom. In the first two scenarios students used masculine generics in classroom dialogue. The third scenario described the nonsexist language policy from the University of Maine and asked the respondents' opinion on such policy. These queries were designed to discover whether or not the respondents would identify the use of sexist language by the students in the first two scenarios and whether or not their responses were consistent with their agreement or disagreement with the policy.

The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. The thematic analysis of the transcribed data included five steps similar to the steps used by Peterson, Witte, Enkerlin-Hoeflich, Espericueta, Flora, Florey, Loughran, and Stuart (1993). These included:

1. Search for individual themes in the transcripts;
2. Develop each of the themes identified in step one;
3. Determine relative significance of themes;
4. Search for groupings and thematic hierarchies;
5. Determine which respondents produced specific data within the categories.

In order to analyze the data, a detailed, line-by-line approach was used, which Strauss and Corbin (1990) characterize as the most detailed and generative type of analysis. In this process the discourse was reduced into units. The purpose was to identify themes within sentences or fragments rather than a grammatical unit. Therefore, the unit of analysis in this coding was the unit of significant meaning, or theme, and the surrounding words or sentences that provided the context.

After the themes of sentences or sentence fragments were identified, they were compared one against another and a cluster was created inductively for each of those that appeared to pertain to a similar phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The clusters suggested units of meaning or themes related to language from the reduced text. Looking at the thematic clusters and the original data the discourse was analyzed and abstracted further in relation to each of the research questions.

Results

In order to answer the two research questions, it was necessary to examine and interpret the original data and the thematic clusters. In the section that follows, the results for the research questions

are described. The assumptions about language made by the students and instructors are provided. In addition, the implicit language theories revealed from the discourse when students and instructors discuss the issue of sexist language are described.

Assumptions About Language

The first research question asked about the assumptions that students and instructors make about the nature of language and its role in shaping and changing society. In order to answer the question, I looked at any general themes about the nature of language that were apparent in the thematic clusters and the original data. I grouped several assumptions about language and titled them in the form of propositions that follow.

Language Can/Cannot Create Change

The last question of each interview asked the respondents if language reform can change people's views, behavior and/or society. The answers received were diverse and are worth noting. Regarding language changing views and attitudes, various respondents perceived language reform as one of the most powerful ways people can facilitate their own change. One instructor stated that "the ultimate change has to the individual so the more that we can educate, the better off we are going to be." He believed that education about language can change our views by making us more conscious of our behavior and hopefully that will lead to change. Similarly, an instructor who models nonsexist language stated that using gender neutral terms in class influences people's thinking about the appropriateness of women in a certain role that was previously defined by a male term. Another instructor stated:

> Certainly, one can change one's attitude by changing the language when one talks about something. If one only has to look at the treatment of the Soviet Union as our enemy in the cold war, and they are bad and terrible. Now, they are poor victims that are suffering their own internal strife and that we have to help them. Just the way in which we couch the arguments, we try to stand in someone else's position and see it described. Learning American history not spoken from the conqueror's point of view but the conquered point of view changes the viewpoint, it changes the attitude, it changes the assumptions that are made so that it can change. . . . people's attitudes are based on non conscious information, I think, for the most part. When

we make them make it conscious. In other words, you make them explore their assumptions, which changes them from assumptions to attitudes.

Being exposed to language reform was also reported as having a subtle impact on people's thinking. One response maintained that changing the language doesn't automatically change people's attitudes but it allows the attitude to change. A student claimed that if language reform is implemented gradually it can make people more open minded but not necessarily affect adult behavior. Another respondent thought that language could affect how a child views opportunities and possibilities the child has growing up. But at the same time, that same respondent believed that language can only make a contribution to change at the margin. He claimed that if changing the language is compatible with changes in circumstance then language can at the margin, reinforce that change.

In addition to changing people's views and attitudes, language reform was reported as having the ability to change behavior. Two students believed that we learn from our language and communication we are exposed to and this affects thought and behavior. Therefore, a student claimed that "if you think a certain way and you speak a certain way, you will also act a certain way." Similarly, one student stated that "since it [sexist language] has been made an issue a lot more people are aware of it and are willing to give women probably a lot more chances than they would have before, whereas it would have been routine to hire a man for a certain job . . . it's opened some doors for women."

Although some respondents believed that this change in views and behavior could eventually change society, they thought that it would be a long process. One respondent, in discussing the issue of nonsexist language use, stated that "if enough people do it, then maybe then it gets to spread, and then it begins to change the way we look at things in society, the way we speak in society." Another respondent felt that language reform could change society but not necessarily in a positive way. She asserted that the language, in and of itself, is not always used to enlighten the masses. "I think it's a tool used by the controlling group to manipulate their positions and our responses and that we can do the same thing."

Other respondents argued that language reform could not change society at all. Although one student would prefer the change in society, she believed that it would be too difficult. Similarly, another student thought that language is not close enough to people's hearts to create any change. One instructor

who did not see the current society as necessarily needing change reported that society is changing already and that the language in its own evolutionary time will come to describe those changes.

At the most extreme end of the spectrum, two respondents did not see language reform as having the ability to change anything. One instructor claimed that it is the other way around; people's views change and then they use a different language to express that. A student did not think that language reform in regard to changing people's views, behavior, or society made any sense. She believed that people are just ignorant and it is going to take more than the changing of language to change them. She stated "I don't think they should change the language, I think they should change the behavior."

Language has Various Functions in Society

Along with people's views of the shaping forces of language, people's view of the functions of language in society is also very individualized. Language is often seen as a mirror, a tool or weapon, and/or a frame. Some people suggested that language serves only one of these functions while other people claimed that language can have several functions.

Language reflects society. Many respondents spoke about how, because our society is changing, our language is changing in order to reflect that. One economics instructor claimed that "Society is changing. I think the language is going to come about in its own evolutionary timing to describe those changes because people are going to pay the price for making the mistakes." She also stated that no one plotted words to be used but that the words have evolved "out of just customary use." In regard to the word "housewife" she stated that "it evolves out of the fact that people, women, were traditionally in the house. So, there is this efficiency in language that people don't design into it."

In discussing the same issue, a male economics instructor believed that females in the past would specialize more in household production and have many children because of the high death ratio. He believed that a woman was called a "housewife" because she had "the comparative advantage in household production. And our language probably reflects that."

In addition, respondents spoke about how language reflects one's culture. One instructor stated that you can learn a great deal about a culture by looking at its language. She claimed:

> I was told by people in Spanish that "victim" no matter who the victim is, man or woman, is called feminine. "Victim" is always a female word. What does that mean? You can be a

detective by using the language. What are the images? Whose language is studied? Why is white middle class, middle Atlantic accents seen as the language and everyone else is the Spanglish, or Afro-American English?

A Filipino student spoke about his own language and his experiences learning new languages. He believed that language "gives me a great learning point of view about what people expect of me as whatever gender I am." He discussed that in his language they have gender neutral pronouns. He stated that in the past, his culture did not mark distinctions according to gender as much as they do now. The reason he provided for this was the influence of Western thought and religion on the Filipino culture. In essence, he believed that the culture has changed and the language now reflects that change. For example, he stated "I learned about how our language, the dynamics of our language, is not a sexist thing. Not until, not until the introduction of certain things."

Language is a tool and a weapon. Human beings use language to interact with one another. Because such acts as persuading, inquiring, requesting, defending, challenging, and retreating are generally carried out through the use of language, people often see language as a tool (Frank & Treichler, 1989). One instructor pointed out that language is "a tool used by the controlling group to manipulate their positions and our responses . . . we can do the same thing."

People who view language as a tool often see language as a means to an end. This approach corresponds to the pragmatic function of language that describes language as a way to get things done. One instructor stated that students realize that "if they try different words, they get different responses." Another respondent identified the necessity to change one's language in certain situations. "If I come in a very political environment, then I will use "they".

In addition to a tool, many respondents described the different ways that language can be used as a weapon. This theme came through in the cluster about affect in which four of the five respondents of this cluster were female. The emotions discussed in regard to language ranged from being angry and "pissed off" to being hurt. One African American instructor spoke about how he can relate to the "emotionalism" of sexist language because of his experiences with racist language. He claims that both racist and sexist language have been used as a weapon by the controlling group to cause harm. He plays

"Ouch" games in his class that allow students to say the word "ouch" when some one's use of language has hurt or bothered them. He then brings it to the forefront for discussion.

Many of the responses from females spoke about how language makes them angry because it has been used as a weapon both to dismiss and to trick them. A few of the respondents wondered how males would feel if they were constantly dismissed by the language. Another respondent talked about how she has been taught to buy into the language without questioning it. She has to be "constantly alert" to the language so that it does not dismiss her sex. She claims it makes her choose between being a woman and being a person.

Language frames our thought. Beyond language use as a weapon, some respondents believed that language can actually frame our thought and reality. One respondent stated that "I think language really does frame the way we see the world. I think we see what we believe, and we believe what we are told, and what we see, those are described to us through language." Another respondent believed that if we consistently talk about a "chairperson" of the board rather than a "chairman" of the board, eventually that will have an influence on people's thinking about the appropriateness of a woman in that role. "They begin to think that it's normal or natural to be in a role that had been defined previously with a male term."

Because language may provide the lens in which people see the world, attention to language and its use seems essential. "Language frames the way we see the world and in order for people to understand how they are seeing the world, I think they have to be more cognitive of their language." One instructor claimed that when she questions the foundations for any phenomenon, she asks herself what the language is doing as a function to help her organize her information. "Can I change this attitude, well, can I change this language, can I change this perception"?

From this perspective, relying on a single language seemingly would provide only one frame to see the world through. Two respondents discussed how a person who knows multiple languages is not as limited in thought because multiple languages offer multiple frames. One response was:

> We are limited when we speak only one language. People with multiple languages have multiple vocabularies to talk about things. People with multi-lingual backgrounds have more experiences

> in the world. . . . They just have more ways to experience it. They have more definitions available to them than people who speak only one language.

The discourse revealed a number of assumptions and tensions about the nature of language: language can create change or language cannot create change, language can reflect society or language can frame society, and language can be used as a tool or language can be used as a weapon. These incongruent views and assumptions about language are likely due to the differing language theories held by the respondents.

Language Theory

The second research question inquired about the implicit theories revealed from students' and instructors' discourse about sexist language and how they compare to the more formal theories of language. In order to answer this question, several of the themes from the student and instructor discourse were linked with the six language approaches discussed previously. From this it became apparent that their discourse centered around two fairly coherent and complete implicit language theories.

Referential View

Both subcategories of the referential view consider language as an instrument people use, and the meaningfulness of language resides in its reference to some collection of entities (either subjective mental entities or objective external entities). Language is void of intrinsic meaning apart from the language user's consciousness and can be viewed as a container which remains separable from the meaning/information it brings us.

The distinction between subjective and objective views in the general referential conception is the question of whether the reference or the referent is the primary source of meaning. As mentioned previously, the objective referential position denies the existence of any realm of mental entities. Although it is difficult to determine by the comments whether some of the respondents viewed meaning as a given property of the object or of consciousness, many of the responses given seemed to favor the subjective referential view of language and meaning. Language was labeled unimportant, a habit, and merely a reflection of society. Several of the possible links of these labels to the referential view are discussed in the following section.

Language is unimportant. Proponents of the subjective referential view regard language as a container for meanings. The words do not actually mean, but meaning resides in people. Therefore, too much attention to words may seem a waste of time to some people who follow this perspective. Many of the respondents' comments claiming that language was "no big deal" echoed this perspective. One student stated that "I am not a huge semantics person. I think it is kind of nitty-gritty. If it is getting your point across, I don't think it's so necessary. " This statement implies that as long as a person can get her or his point across through his or her use of language, the particular words used do not really matter. Another student who addressed the issue of a person's intent was opposed to the attention to language because she felt that "people could get in trouble for saying something and they're really innocent, you know, they don't mean it." She further stated that "someone could call you a "girl," and . . . it would be cool, or "gal" because you know that they are cool. But . . . if the person is trying to be mean . . ."

Comments in support of this view often mentioned the generic "he." One student stated that when he had to use a pronoun, he would use either the generic "he" or "she" consistently throughout. I noticed in the interview that he chose to use only the generic "he," quite frequently, as a matter of fact. He stated that he chooses generics because they still get his point across. Similarly, an instructor allows her students to use the language they choose to. "I give people a lot of leeway to use the generic 'he' for expediency's sake." Once again, she seems to know what they are "intending to mean." Another student felt that when she uses the generic "he," she means "he or she" and that teachers' attention to the detail of that use of language is "nitty-gritty." She will use both pronouns if she is made to but would rather not for she does not agree with such attention to language.

The above comments imply that language is relatively unimportant, so therefore, there is no need to change it. Yet, two male respondents who shared the above view about the lack of importance in the words and their conveyance of meaning, asserted that because the language is so unimportant to them, it is no "big deal" to change it for others. One student stated that "even if I think it's not a big deal . . . there's no purpose in causing offense to people for nothing." Therefore, one can conclude that the belief that language is trivial can be a double edge sword. Either it is no "big deal," so why change it? Or it is no "big deal," so why not change it?

Language use is a habit. Several responses stated that language was simply a habit. As a child one learns it and uses it without any conscious thought about the actual word usage. Habitual use is not intentional and therefore the meanings of the words used habitually are not intentional either. The meaning resides in the mind of the language user. One student states that "it doesn't seem worth putting a whole lot of stress into [using nonsexist language] just 'cause it's just habit. That's how people develop through history." Another student responded that people "don't pay attention to what they are saying half the time so it's really difficult. People say things . . . where they don't know that they said it or not." Once again, people are paying attention to the meaning in their mind and do not recognize the possibility that there is also meaning in the words.

One student questioned his own meaning-making because of the language reform movement. To him, words refer to what he means for them for them to refer to. He stated "I'm not a chauvinist at all. But, I find myself asking myself, 'now is that chauvinistic?'. . . that's a word you grew up to use, you know, when you related to a fireman, woman or man, . . . you said "fireman." Maynard (1970) states that "our culture trains us and reinforces us to view the world through semantically colored glasses. Language is our greatest habit" (p. 136).

Language is merely a reflection of society. The idea that language merely reflects how we think about society corresponds well with the subjective referential view. We use words to represent our meaning of reality as we have come to know it. When reality changes, we find words to represent the new meaning of reality. Language is simply a practical tool. One instructor stated that because society is changing, "the language is going to come about in its own evolutionary timing to describe those changes." Another respondent stated that once society changes, people's views change and "then they use a different language to express that."

Systemic View

As previously mentioned, the referential view assumes the reality of our experience is both of ourselves as consciousness and of the world. The systemic view differs in that it examines the role language itself plays in constituting the meaning of our experience of both the self and the world (Grossberg, 1979). The language is far from being neutral because meaning is seen as a property of the linguistic system or social act and, therefore, does not separate consciousness and the world.

Objective systemic. The proponents of the two subcategories of the systemic view divide over how to describe the linguistic system. The objective systemic approach emphasizes that the structure of our understanding of ourselves and the world is determined by the structure of the language system itself.

Some of the comments from the respondents asserted that our language system can actually frame our thought and reality. Similar to Sapir's view of language mentioned previously, one instructor stated that "language frames the way we see the world and in order for people to understand how they are seeing the world, I think they have to be more cognitive of their language." A similar statement by a student discussed that:

> language is, comes from a very deep and complex part of the mind just like behavior. I believe that you can't pinpoint language in your thoughts, they all exist in your mind. They are not part of conscious control. . . . gender bias is particularly deeply ingrained in our use of language.

This statement contends that gender bias exists within our language system. In addition, our language system makes up our thoughts so much so that we fail to be conscious of our language use.

Some respondents described how we are controlled and limited by our language system. Maynard (1970) believes that "the limits of our world are determined by the limits of our language" (p. 136). One instructor stated that our language system gives us our gender roles and limits our choices. Another instructor stated that "we are limited when we speak only one language. People with multiple languages have multiple vocabularies to talk about things." In addition, she expressed that people with multi-lingual backgrounds have more experiences in the world because they have more ways to experience it. "They have more definitions available to them than people who speak only one language."

A trilingual student helped to further the above point when he addressed the pronoun gender distinction. He stated that when he learned his language, it did not have the pronoun distinctions (he/she) like Spanish or English. After learning two other languages, he notices gender distinctions made but still does not think in terms of those gender distinctions. During the interview, he spoke about a male professor and unknowingly interchanged the pronouns he used. For example, he stated "I had one microbiology teacher who used to say a lot of jokes about her mother and about her, her ex-wife. . . . and then at one point he, she, he even said jokingly . . ." One could conclude from this example that he

was still operating under his original language system which did not mark gender. Yet, because he used the pronouns, although incorrectly, he was aware of the necessity to differentiate. In addition, the other languages he learned made him more conscious of the frame his language system has provided for him.

The comments about language providing our world view and foundation argue the same point as Saussure did with the distinction of *langue* and *parole*. Because *langue* is the system or code that is prior to actual language use, it is the same for all members of a language community and it creates our social foundation. One instructor discussed language in the beginning of all of her classes because she believed the language system shapes our reality. She stated that "we can't even talk about the issues we are going to talk about until we talk about the language we're going to use to talk about the issues."

Subjective systemic. As previously noted, proponents of the objective systemic view find it difficult to account for historical change and individual creativity because the code, the language, is static. However, the subjective systemic approach begins with the primacy of speech. Meanings emerge from the system of language use, speech acts, or symbolic interactions. These meanings are publicly available and identifiable based on the role they play in a particular context or situation.

Because language is seen as an action, as doing something, the assumption that language is a tool or a weapon corresponds with the subjective systemic view. Language has functional uses and practical value. Maynard (1970) states that "one can liken language to air—colorless, odorless, necessary for survival: but language can also be like carbon monoxide, also a colorless, odorless gas, but very poisonous" (p. 135). In other words, language can be taken for granted as a tool, but still may be used as a weapon. Many responses state that language use can actually show respect, disrespect, include, exclude, and harm others. One instructor concluded her interview by stating that "I would just underscore the point about inclusion in the classroom and how excluded students can feel, when they feel you aren't talking about them or to them in your use of . . . language." Another instructor stated that "in order to get rid of sexist language, it has to be brought to people's attention that it is harmful that they are doing it."

Many respondents also believed that language use can be modified in order to receive certain responses. They do not take a philosophical or ethical view of these issues at all, but a pragmatic one. One respondent found that once students become conscious of their language system, "they realize that if

they try different words, they get different responses." She further addressed this issue by discussing how the naming process can act to affect people's perceptions. She renames sexist language so that students are less resistant. She tells them "Even if you don't want to . . . call it nonsexist, how 'bout we call it accurate or inclusive language."

Processual View

The proponents of the processual view argue that the fundamental structure of human experience is an ongoing process of the constitution of meaning within which subject and object are constituted. These orientations acknowledge a unity of subject and object in the process of signification preceding their separation.

Subjective processual. The subjective processual view goes beyond the subjective systemic view by describing the particular relation between language and transcendental consciousness (Grossberg, 1979). The most general characterization of the subjective processual view involves the redefinition of experience in terms of the process of intentionality, which is the constantly repeated conjunction of people and the world (Grossberg, 1979). Language is not frozen or static. Several themes did acknowledge an awareness of change by seeing language as a process rather than a frozen system. One respondent stated that "every year, and every era . . . the dynamics of language continuously change . . . instructors have to approach it in a way suitable for the students."

However, only one of the respondents' comments repeatedly expressed senses of language and meaning similar to the subjective processual view. She addressed meaning as the conjunction of more than just the signifier and the signified. She stated that:

> there are things beyond language. . . . Language, as we talk about it intellectually, is one phenomena, but that there are many languages people respond to using art, dance, things that don't have words specifically linked to them, but that communicate to us. We are moved by them. We have another system that resounds . . . we are more than just the intellectual, attitudinal manipulation of language. There are other systems of communication.

As an instructor, she described these systems to her students in order to "talk about relationships linked to being fully human.."

Objective processual. The objective processual approach is the most radical of views because it rejects the notion of a source or origin of meaning. Reality is a process constitutive of the meaningfulness and structure of experience. Language and language use cannot be separated. Because this view does not look for "meaning" of a text (assuming that there exists some stable and unified set of signifieds hidden below the surface of the signifiers), it is near impossible for me to determine from these texts whether or not a respondent held this view of meaning and language. If they did, their expression of it, their meaning of it, would only exist in the moment.

Implicit Language Theories

The above assumptions of the respondents that compare to formal language theory are based on their implicit language theory. An implicit language theory organizes a person's views about language. Certain components make up a language theory. The issues that are addressed in one's implicit language theory are the definition of language, the learning of language, the making of meaning through language and how language is used. Many of the responses given by the people in this study centered around two different implicit theories of language. The first implicit theory is that language is a system of signs that we create and use. The second also sees language as a system of signs, but a constantly changing and evolving system that creates us.

Language is a System of Signs that We Create and Use

Many respondents perceived language as a shared code we have created and use. Our language system is something one is conditioned to use as a child. The language we use is largely dependent on the functions that it serves and is often learned by trial and error. It is a habit that many of us are unconscious of. The meaning is in the user, not the referent. Because language is simply used to refer, to transmit information, and to make the user's meaning transparent, the language itself is relatively innocent. Yet, being conscious and aware of the words can help people understand how others may be interpreting the meaning. Several respondents stated that because other people are sensitive to language use now, they will choose to use different words to make others happy. One person stated that "you have to be careful about it just 'cause people's interpretations and people are so sensitive to it nowadays."

Although many respondents spoke about the need to be aware of language use, they failed to do so in their interview. Only two of the respondents noted the use of sexist language in the two student and instructor dialogue scenarios that began the interviews. These were both female instructors. In addition, although most respondents agreed that using the generic "he" was a form of sexist language, five respondents used the generic "he" in their interviews. Two of the respondents were Economics instructors (one male, one female) and the other three were male students. For example, one instructor stated "The language could affect how a child growing up, you know, views opportunities and possibilities that *he* has." One could conclude that these respondents very much still believe that what they mean is the meaning that counts. In other words, to them, the generic "he" still means both genders.

Language is a System of Signs that Creates People

Language as a system of signs that creates people is another implicit theory of language that only a few of the respondents seemed to have. Language is a constantly changing and evolving system. People learn language for the most part, unconsciously through observing models and immersion into the language system. The language people use shapes thoughts and meaning comes from the language system. The responses that supported this view discussed how language provides a foundation and frames the way people see the world. The language system "works us over, massages us, and all the more so because of our being unaware of it" (Postman & Weingartner, 1969, p. 105). Therefore, language is not only used to define people's reality, but to create people's identity. Because of this, language can be very powerful. It can create community or create separation. It can comfort people or it can harm people. Those responses that discussed the effect that language has had on them emotionally support this view of language. For example, one respondent stated:

> I have felt excluded in a situation where the instructor consistently used male biased terminology. It makes me feel that I don't want to participate in the discussion. That he's not talking to me. That he doesn't want me to be a student in the class.

Unlike the previously mentioned implicit theory of language, this implicit language theory asserts that being conscious of the language does not simply have people become aware of their language use, their consciousness must be raised. Consciousness-raising is a transformative act. This is due to the

foundational nature of language; language does not simply refer to reality, it constitutes reality. Therefore, once people become aware of their creation of reality through language, people will continue to question the relationship between language and reality. Where becoming aware of a sexist word is static, consciousness-raising about the language system is a process. It is a reflexive shift. One instructor asserted that:

> as you make your consciousness-raising habits . . . it continues to happen. I don't think that once you learn consciousness raising, that you can turn it off. It may get dimmed in certain areas. If you don't run into different groups of people, you may learn to not be conscious about their issues if there's not a reflection back to you to say, "But, that really doesn't represent my world."

Of all the respondents, the ones who gave responses in support of the above view were the ones who were consistent in their belief about the importance of nonsexist language. Therefore, one could conclude that when people see language as having power to create, to shape, or to blemish, they are more likely to attempt to use nonsexist language consistently.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the assumptions about language from the student and instructor discourse revealed that many respondents provided comments that were consistent with the referential view of language. They stated that language is unimportant, a habit, and a reflection of society. However, some respondents looked at language as more of a system and provided responses consistent with both the objective systemic and subjective systemic view. A few threads of responses asserted that language is a subjective process but the fitting of responses to the objective processual view could not be determined. The two implicit language theories that the student and instructor discourse seemed to center around were language as a system of signs that people create and use and language as a system of signs, but a constantly changing and evolving system that creates people.

All people have a theory of language that provides order to our everyday experiences of the world. Unfortunately, most people are unaware of their assumptions about language. Maynard (1970) contends that because people swim in an ocean of language, every one has a perpetual self-inventory job of premise evaluation. "We must bring our assumed premises out into the open—up to the surface—

where they can be examined by ourselves and the world" (p. 136). Parain (1971) maintains that "we are a kind of compost heap on which language germinates, grows, and flowers" (Parain, 1971, p. 113). People can create it (the compost heap), but, it also creates people. "While language indeed serves as a means of control and domination, it can also serve as an instrument of liberation and growth" (Berlin, 1991, p. 170). It is for this very reason that the use of nonsexist language seems so important. If language not only reflects but helps maintain society, "changing the usage and structure of language constitutes at least a first step toward changing societal practices" (Blaubergs, 1978, p. 245).

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